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National Food Security with Reference to the UN Human Security Paradigm: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The most essential need of human beings is food. In this paper the national food security in Pakistan has been discussed on the basis of human security concept of the United Nations (UN). The paradigm shifts the focus from the safety of states to the safety of people in policy. The method adopted for the paper is qualitative and desk based. It looks at core concepts and then takes a close look at the evidence available nationally and internationally with regards to Pakistan. The evidence is of a country that produces sufficient wheat and yet has a high level of hunger. Some 42% of people are experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. In 2018, 4 out of every 10 children under 5 were stunted. This is exacerbated by the 2022 flood, water shortage, increasing poverty, changing wheat policy and insecurity in the region. The paper suggests that in Pakistan food insecurity is not only a production issue, but also an access, nutrition, resilience and voice issue. It has emphasized that food security is an integral component of national security for Pakistan. It provides recommendations for social protection, nutrition, climate and water resilience, wheat policy, data, governance and cooperation.

Keywords: *food security, human security, freedom from want, Pakistan, nutrition, climate resilience*

INTRODUCTION

Food security is the base of national life. When the child is hungry, a child cannot learn well. A hungry worker shall not get any good wages. States had focused primarily on food as a problem of national supply for much of the 20th century. The question that was asked was whether the country had enough grain to meet its needs, or was grain being imported. This is a still significant, but no longer sufficient, perspective.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was one of the first organizations to state in 1994 that security means that people are safe in their lives, free from fear, free from want. It included food security among seven components of human security (UNDP, 1994). The UN General Assembly (UNGA, 2012) has agreed on a definition of human security in Resolution 66/290. This is now the main official reference point.

Pakistan is a handy example. It is the country with over 240 million population (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b). Agriculture contributes about 23% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about one-third of its workforce. Nearly 30 million tonnes of wheat was produced in the country in 2025–26 (Mahmood, 2026). However, Pakistan is scoring 106th of 122 countries in the 2026 Global Hunger Index and the country is considered in a “serious” situation (Arab News, 2026). About 42% of its people faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022–2024 (Shah, 2025). This supply/well-being riddle is the core of this paper.

The puzzle is sharpened by recent shocks. In 2022, 33 million people were impacted by the floods, and the damage and losses amount to approximately USD 30 billion (World Bank, 2022). Poverty rose from 21.9% in 2018–19 to 28.9% in 2024–25 (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026a). In April 2025, India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) raising fresh concerns about water (Michel, 2025).

This paper is divided into five sections. It starts by giving an overview of the key concepts. It then outlines the food security situation in Pakistan, examines the key challenges and a review of existing policy. Concludes with implications and recommendations. For three reasons, this subject is today's topic. Despite some recent gains in agricultural production, hunger persists. Climate and water risks are increasingly becoming a problem. And the world discussion on human security and SDGs provides Pakistan with a collective vocabulary and a common tool-kit to use in its planning process.

Prior to writing, it is important to identify an aim and research questions:

1. This paper seeks to explore the issue of food security in the country within the context of the UN paradigm of Human Security and to give policy lessons. The study is guided by the following questions:

2. How is food security explained by the human security paradigm?

3. What is the situation of food security in Pakistan and what are the major challenges to it?

4. What does it mean if the human security approach is taken as a policy for Pakistan?

METHODS

This is a qualitative, desk based policy study. Does not contain primary data. It relies on 3 types of sources. The first are basic documents on food security and human security, including UN documents and peer reviewed articles. The second group consists of official and expert evaluations on Pakistan, including the National Nutrition Survey 2018, analysis of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) 2025-26 and the post-disaster assessment of the 2022 floods. The third are recent press reports of new data, such as the Pakistan Economic Survey 2025–26 and reports of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The paper first plots evidence on the food security-human security matrix and then evaluates the existing policy. Figures are from various years and sources, so each is reported with reference to its source and year.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

During the seventies, food security meant the continuous supply at national level. The goals were adequate stocks of grain and stable prices in the world. This approach was changed by Amartya Sen. He has demonstrated in his research on famines that people can starve in the face of plenty. Lack of entitlement is frequently a cause of hunger. Food is unavailable to people because they do not have the resources to produce it, exchange it, or earn it, or access it from public sources (Sen, 1981). The focus then shifted to households and individuals, from the national food balance sheet. This shift from the global and national to the household and individual level and from an objective perspective on food to one that also emphasizes the importance of food safety and quality has been described by Maxwell (1996).

The ideas were developed at the World Food Summit of 1996. It is defined by FAO (1996) as "the condition of having enough, or access to enough, safe, and nutritious food at all times, to maintain an active and healthy life". According to this definition, there are four dimensions:

- Availability: Adequate food production, import or storage.

- Access: people earn enough and have access to the means to access food.

- Utilization: Individuals are able to eat the food properly. Clean water, sanitation, health care and good feeding practices are required.

- Stability: the other three dimensions are stable over time, even in the face of shocks.

The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) incorporated two additional aspects in 2020: agency and sustainability (HLPE, 2020). Agency is the ability of individuals to make decisions about food and influence food systems. Sustainability: The ability of food systems to provide food to people without compromising the environment. These additions move towards the idea of food security towards the idea of empowerment, which is human security. However, measurement continues to be difficult, in that there is no universal measure which reflects all dimensions (Barrett, 2010). This paper will therefore draw on multiple indicators.

The UN Human Security Paradigm

The modern concept of human security starts from Human Development Report 1994.Human Development Report 1994 is the starting point of the modern concept of human security. According to the report, many feel insecure because of their concerns about everyday life and not because of the prospect of a world war. They're concerned about employment, wages, well-being, and security. It said that the security concept should shift away from the national security exclusively towards much greater importance of security of the individuals. It identified seven "security areas": economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNDP, 1994). In relation to food, it declared that everyone must have basic food both physically and economically, at all times. It also made a crucial comment. The issue is not food scarcity, but lack of access to food, which is based on poverty (UNDP, 1994). This is in line with Sen's perception.

Human Security Now was published by the Commission on Human Security in 2003, with Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen as its Chair. It set a goal of human security as the protection of the vital core of all human lives which promotes human freedoms and realization. It emphasized two measures. When protection is present, state and other entities provide people with a barrier against threats. Empowerment involves building individuals' capacity to manage risks themselves (Commission on Human Security, 2003).

During the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the world leaders emphasized the people's right to live in freedom and dignity free from poverty and despair; they also agreed to define Human Security during the General Assembly (UNGA, 2005). After years of debate, the Assembly adopted Resolution 66/290 on September 10, 2012. The resolution (UNGA, 2012) states that: Human security is people's right to live free from poverty and despair in their right to live in freedom and dignity. Everyone, particularly the needy, has the right to live free from fear and free from hunger.

- It requires a person-centred, comprehensive, context specific and prevention-focused response to build the protection and empowerment of all people and communities.

- It acknowledges the interconnections of peace, development and human rights.

- It is separate from the responsibilities of the protector. It's not about threats, force, it's not a substitute for state security.

- It is national owned and supports national solutions that are locally appropriate.

Finally, the final points are important for Pakistan. The resolution does not require relinquishment of control by states. It seeks governments to take charge of the agenda. A policy framework was added in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goal

2 calls for an end to hunger, food security and improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture (UNGA, 2015).

Critiques and the Link to Food Security

Not everyone is a fan of the paradigm. Paris (2001) made the point that the concept is not clear and inquired if it represents a paradigm shift, or just "hot air." Another more limited perspective offered by King and Murray (2001) is the measurement of the number of years lived in a state of poor health. Owen (2004) proposed a definition based on thresholds and threats that are both severe and widespread. Resolution 66/290 directly addresses one concern. It does not replace state security (UNGA, 2012). If a state does not have the means of producing food for its citizens, that state is not secure. When a state is under attack, it can't defend its farmers and water. The issue of food security is an obvious example in which the two converge.

Four aspects of food security are included in human security. It is a statement of freedom from want and hunger is the most direct statement of want. Second, food insecurity is typically a consequence of other insecurities, including loss of income, illness, flood and conflict. It is important to note that the paradigm requires full answers. Third, the approach is people-centered and context-specific. It queries who and where are at the highest risk, what national averages mask. Fourth, it is prevention-oriented and values empowerment. It fosters resilience, in advance of a crisis, and seeks participation in decisions that impact on them. This is the meaning of agency for food security (HLPE, 2020).

The Evidence on Food Security in Pakistan

Pakistan is a country with a lot of agricultural production. In 2025–26, agriculture grew by 2.89%, up from 1.53% the year before. The wheat production increased by 4.3% to 29.61 million tonnes. Rice increased to almost 10 million tonnes by 2.8% whereas sugarcane increased by 6.2%. Maize fell by 2.7% and cotton by 0.5%. The livestock sector experienced a 3.75% growth and contributes approximately 62% of the value added in agriculture (Mahmood, 2026). The FAO's early warning system projected the wheat production for 2025 at approximately 29 million tonnes, which is approximately 5% higher than the 5-year average (Ahmed, 2025b). The availability of food at a national level does not equate to everyone having access to a nutritious diet.

There are warning signs on the supply side, however. The government ended the minimum support price for wheat in May 2024, leading to a decrease of 6.5% in the area of wheat cultivation in 2025. Some farmers were induced to change their area of planting to vegetables, oilseeds and other cash crops due to low prices at planting time (Ahmed, 2025b). The additional risk comes from water stress. Pakistan's water stress ranks among the 14th most water-stressed nations and as the temperature climbs, the monsoons shift variability and the dry spells are lengthening, all of which are impacting yield (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b).

Access: Poverty and Prices

Access is where the main problem lies. The poverty rate rose from 21.9% in 2018–19 to 28.9% in 2024–25 (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026a). For poor households, food is the largest part of the budget. With a rise in prices they reduce the number of meals they eat, start buying cheaper food or fall into debt. For 2025–26, the key drivers of acute hunger in the IPC analysis are weak purchasing power, market dependence, price fluctuations and indebtedness. It also indicates wheat flour as a particular concern (IPC, 2026).

The data of the surveys is indicative. In the national nutrition survey 2018, 36.9% of households were food insecure using FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). According to the latest data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released in the press, 42.1% (over 104 million people) of the population in Pakistan were moderately or severely food insecure in 2022–24. Undernourishment was prevalent in 40 million (or 16.5%) people (Shah, 2025). Pakistan has been

ranked at 25.5, a "serious" level, in the Global Hunger Index 2026. While this is up from 36.2 in 2000, it is lower than what is seen in other nations in South Asia, with only Afghanistan having a lower score (Arab News, 2026). The 2025 edition reported 26.0 and the same rank, 106th, among 123 countries (Dawn, 2025). It is not possible to compare these numbers precisely because they are calculated in different years and in different ways. All three reveal a significant proportion of the population is food insecure.

The Nutrition Crisis – Utilization

Utilization is the area with the lowest score. According to National Nutrition Survey 2018, 40.2% of children under 5 years old were stunted, 17.7% wasted, and 28.9% underweight. The wastage rate was the highest on record for the national surveys. 53.7% of children under five, 56.6% of adolescent girls, and 41.7% of women of reproductive age (WRA) were anemic (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). A double burden was also revealed in the survey. The number of women who were under nutrition dropped to 14.4%, but those who were overweight and obese increased to 37.8% (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019).

Newer data indicate that the issue remains. According to the 2026 Global Hunger Index, three in 10 children in the country suffer from stunting (33.6%), wasting (9.8%) and under-five mortality (5.6%) (Arab News, 2026). These are not the same as the 2018 survey as they are from other years and data sets. Humanitarian data goes in the same direction. There were 2.1 million children aged 6-59 months who were suffering from acute malnutrition and required treatment between March 2023 and January 2024. Acute malnutrition remained above 10% in parts of Balochistan and early 2024 in certain districts was above 30% (Ahmed, 2025a).

Stability: Repeated Shocks

There is a very poor record with regard to stability — keeping food safe during shocks. 11.8 million people were in crisis or worse in 43 rural districts in the 2024 peak (November 2023 to January 2024); approximately 2.2 million were in emergency. The 22% of the population analyzed lived in a crisis or worse in 68 rural districts that were affected by flooding, covering 11 million individuals, from November 2024 to March 2025 (Ahmed, 2025a).

The most recent IPC analysis is for December 2025 – September 2026. It is estimated that 7.5 million people will be in high acute food insecurity from December 2025 to March 2026, with approximately 1.25 million people in emergency. The number is expected to drop to 6.7m between April and September 2026. The IPC cautions that this drop may be misleading since the IPC analysis only accounts for 45 districts, a reduction from 68. Balochistan has the highest proportion of the population affected, with a 25% prevalence. Excessively over 3 million people are impacted in Sindh. 30% of the population is affected in 5 districts Musakhel, Zhob, Kachi, Tank and Torghar. This is due to 2025 monsoon floods, drought, dry spells, and localized insecurity (IPC, 2026; UN News, 2026). Thus, acute food insecurity in Pakistan is not an isolated occurrence. It's a recurring pattern.

Agency and Sustainability

The two newer dimensions are less easily measured. Agency means people's voice and choice. The post-flood assessment revealed significant livelihood losses for women, particularly in agriculture and livestock (World Bank, 2022). This indicates that women do have a significant role in the food system, but may have less influence. When it comes to sustainability, a recent study summary states that excessive irrigation, mono-cropping and over-reliance on chemical inputs are detrimental to soil and environment. It notes that if climate change is the sole factor affecting flood and drought impacts, weak governance is a major factor to exacerbate the effects of climate change. It also states that the average renewable freshwater per capita has dropped below 1,000 cubic meters, which is considered as severe scarcity (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b).

To sum up, Pakistan has good availability and poor access, nutrition, and stability. There are significant number of children who are stunted, increasing poverty and a large population. The evidence is consistent with Sen's argument. Hunger is not due to lack of food in the country, but rather the income, health and safety of many households is not sufficient to convert food into well-being (Sen, 1981).

Reading the Evidence Together

Patterns are also evident in space and time. The most severely food insecure provinces are Balochistan, Sindh and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These are areas of significant poverty, poor services, and vulnerability to flooding (Ahmed, 2025a; UN News, 2026). A national average can thus be considered satisfactory when there are districts with emergencies. Each year, a new shock has come. The IPC assessments have been in the same range of acute food insecurity for three consecutive years (several million; IPC, 2026; Ahmed, 2025a). A crisis which repeats itself makes it no longer an emergency. It is a structural issue and structural issues require structural solutions like social protection measures, resilient water systems and improved health care.

Human Security Threats from the lens of Threats

The human security paradigm invites us to consider a range of different kinds of threat simultaneously (UNDP, 1994). The threats to food security are organized in the main categories of food security according to UNDP. They have a strong connection. Floods are a threat to the environment, but they also have an impact on income, health and the political system.

The economy, poverty, and prices policy signals are covered by economic security. Economic security includes the economy, poverty, and prices policy signals. The greatest danger to food access is economic insecurity. The poverty rate was 28.9% in 2024–25, and income per person was USD 1,901 in 2025–26. The economy expanded by 3.7% which is the highest in four years, however, this growth has not yet trickled down to poorest households (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026a). Price shocks have a particularly adverse effect. Debt-load increases rapidly following a shock, and poor households cannot easily access food or purchase in bulk (IPC, 2026).

Policy signals are also important. Pakistan has abolished the minimum support price for wheat in May 2024. In response, farmers reduced the wheat area in 2025 by 6.5% (Ahmed, 2025b). Market reform is not an evil thing. It implies that a plan for stability is needed for major policy adjustments. The human security approach poses the question: who incurs the risk of change? Small farmers and poor consumers will be the most affected ones. Inaction also comes at a cost. The national poverty rate was estimated to have increased by 3.7 to 4.0 percentage points due to the floods in 2022 alone, resulting in an additional 8.4 to 9.1 million poorer people in the country (World Bank, 2022). So the connection between economy and hunger goes through household budgets. A low income family does not have a lot to spare if the price of flour increases, they don't have a lot to spare if they lose a crop, they don't have a lot to spare if they get a bill for a doctor visit. The poor are the first to be affected and the last to benefit; this is what the IPC and the flood assessment demonstrate (IPC, 2026; World Bank, 2022). Stability of food prices is a necessary part of a secure food system, but so is stability of food incomes.

Environmental Security: Climate, Floods, and Water

The most significant long-term risk is likely environmental threats. Over 33 million people were impacted and over 1,730 lives were lost due to the floods of 2022. The estimated damage amounted to over USD 14.9 billion, economic losses were estimated at USD 15.2 billion and the reconstruction costs were estimated at a minimum of USD 16.3 billion. Agriculture and livestock suffered a loss of USD 3.7 billion. Sindh suffered the highest share of losses and damage (70%) and the national GDP declined by approximately 2.2% (World Bank, 2022). The floods affected almost all water related systems in Sindh and to some extent in KP and Balochistan (Ahmed, 2025a). The current acute food insecurity (IPC, 2026) is attributed to the 2025 monsoon floods.

The bigger problem is water. The Indus Basin irrigation system supports almost 90% of the country's agriculture (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b). Watering of crops in the Indus system occupies over 90% of the country's water and agriculture accounts for around 94% of water withdrawals (Michel, 2025). In April 2025, India's Government declared the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 “abeyant” after an attack in the Pakistani town of Pahalgam. The immediate physical impact on Pakistan's water may be limited as India has approximately 3.6 million acre-feet of storage right on the three western rivers, according to Michel, 2025. Nevertheless, the uncertainty in the law and politics is very real. Water diplomacy is an aspect of food security in a country that relies solely on one river system.

It is the poor who are most vulnerable to such threats. They reside in floodplain, are rain-fed farmers with limited recovery power. Resolution 66/290 further refers to resilience as a preventative approach right from the beginning, which also suggests that Pakistan needs to invest in strengthening resilience, not just in relief (UNGA, 2012).

Health Security: Nutrition and Disease

Food and health are interrelated. If someone doesn't feel well, they can't absorb the nutrients from food; if they are ill for lack of nutritional intake, their defenses are lowered. This cycle is detected in child wasting, stunting and anemia in Pakistan (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). There was a health emergency among the 8 million-plus internally displaced people as a result of the floods in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). Stunting is a human security issue due to its potential impact on future learning and earning. High anemia rates of adolescent girls (56.6%) and women (41.7%) also increase the risk to the next generation (UNICEF Pakistan 2019).

Personal, Community and Political Security

Insecurity is a component of this. Localized insecurity is one of the drivers of acute food insecurity as per IPC (2026). The districts with the highest proportions of acutely food insecure people tend to be far away, impoverished, and many are in Balochistan (UN News, 2026).

Insecurity shuts down markets, restricts access to aid and impedes family movement. Institutions matter too. With the implementation of the 18th amendment in 2010, agriculture and several food related issues turned primarily into provincial matters (Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973). While provinces are aware of their needs, there is a need for a national perspective on food stocks, prices, trade and nutrition. The National Food Security Policy announced in 2018 suggested the establishment of a National Food Security Council (NFSC) headed by the Prime Minister and comprised of the chief ministers of the provinces (Monitoring Report, 2018). They point out that the National Climate Change Policy and the National Food Security Policy are poorly implemented, and suggest that the existing rules should be implemented rather than creating new ones (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b). The Constitution also provides just a reason to act. It makes a duty on the State to ensure social and economic development of the people including social development of the people in regard to basic needs of life, including food, for those who are unable to get a livelihood (Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973).

Gender and Vulnerable Groups

There are other groups that are more at risk than others. Women and girls are highly affected by anemia (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019) and their livelihood losses are higher after floods (World Bank, 2022). Children less than five years old, landless and tenant farmers, daily wage laborers, displaced families and those residing in remote areas are also vulnerable. They cannot be identified by viewing national averages. The human security approach calls for context-specific responses (UNGA, 2012). This translates to local data, local targeting, and local voice in practice.

POLICY RESPONSE

In May 2018, Pakistan's Government introduced it's first-ever 'National Food Security Policy'. It aimed to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, to provide access to food for the poor and to make agriculture more productive, competitive and climate-smart and resilient. It had established a goal of 4% growth per year for food production. It also sought to increase farmers' access to seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, credit, and to address land and water use issues. It addressed availability, access, utilization and stability (Monitoring Report, 2018). This was a good beginning. However, the policy was drafted prior to the floods in 2022, the change in the wheat policy, and the recent rise in poverty, and implementation is still low (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b).

The National Security Policy 2022-2026

In January 2022, the Government of Pakistan released the first-ever National Security Policy (NSP). It is 'citizen-centric' and views human security, citizens' wellbeing as a form of non-traditional security. Its theme is economic security. However, a press analysis pointed out that the policy has no direct reference to food security, water security, or climate security; and it contains no implementation action plans (The Diplomat, 2022). This is a gap in light of the human security paradigm. The policy employs the terms of human security, but it does not yet recognize food and water as security issues.

Social Protection

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is the biggest social protection scheme in Pakistan. According to the Economic Survey 2025–26, its allocation for 2025–26 was Rs 722.49 billion, more than 20% above the Rs 598.71 billion allocated in 2024–25. There were approximately 10.2 million beneficiaries of the unconditional cash transfer program. The conditional cash transfer programme, including the nutrition programme 'Benazir Nashonuma' benefited 6.59 million people and cost Rs 133.02 billion. In addition, there are discrepancies regarding the budget data (Shaheen, 2026). Humanitarian interventions also are relevant. To increase the level of cash and voucher assistance and targeted food distribution, the IPC recommends (UN News, 2026). Such actions are important in crisis situations, but cannot be a substitute for policy.

All these policies together demonstrate a concerted effort. The country has a food security policy, a security policy which mentions citizens, and a policy on social protection with a massive budget. The critical question is whether the pieces fit together well, and how quickly they react to a shock. In the following section, the human security principles are applied as a test of this fit.

Assessment in line with the Human Security Principles

Taking a look at the principles outlined in Resolution 66/290 (UNGA 2012), the situation is mixed. This is a general opinion based on the above evidence, and not an audit. BISP's outreach to millions of poor households is a concern regarding data quality, regarding people centered action. (Shaheen, 2026) The policy of 2018 addresses four aspects of food security but weak linkages exist with health, water, and climate policy (Monitoring Report, 2018; Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b). IPC analysis indicated high risk districts, and its coverage dropped from 68 districts to 45 districts (UN News, 2026). In the case of prevention, much of the responding is after shocks (World Bank, 2022). Women, tenants and small farmers have limited voice on empowerment. Regarding national ownership, the National Security Policy is focused on the citizens but has not yet become a policy with a basic employment issue of food and water (The Diplomat, 2022). There has been some development of appropriate tools in Pakistan and particularly in social protection. It is weaker in its capacity to prevent, coordinate and empower, which is a reason why shocks are still becoming hunger.

Why the Human Security Lens Adds Value

One may wonder what is the added value of using a human security lens for food security approach in Pakistan? It provides three things. First, it shifts the focus of the question from “How much food is there?” to “Who is at risk, and why?” This highlights the families and districts "buried" under national averages. Examples of this type of knowledge are IPC district data and nutrition surveys (IPC, 2026; UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). Secondly, it connects the food system with other systems. World Bank (2022) noted that the 2022 floods had a concurrent impact on food, health, housing, and income. A detailed plan is a better match for such events. Third, it puts prevention and people on center stage. The UNGA (2012) Resolution 66/290 encourages solutions focused on prevention and empowerment of people and communities. These are the aspects where Pakistan's current policy is weak in its approach.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The human security paradigm proposes that Pakistan's narrow attention to crop production needs to broaden to attention on food security of the people. The recommendations below have been made based on the evidence and the Resolution 66/290.

Address Food Security as an Integral Component of National Security

Food and water security is integral to national security. The National Security Policy should be amended to state this and to include specific targets with regard to hunger, stunting and water security. The National Food Security Council proposed in 2018 should meet regularly at the highest level (Monitoring Report, 2018). There should be a short annual report to Parliament on food and nutrition security that the public can see the progress. It is consistent with the principle of national ownership (UNGA, 2012). The concept should not be imported into Pakistan. It can utilize it to arrange their very own priorities.

Construct Shock Responsive Social Protection

BISP is a great resource. The next thing is to get it to react to shocks. In the event of floods or drought, support should rapidly be scaled up to those affected by the disaster. Reliable household data, agreed triggers and readily available funds will be needed. When prices are going up, transfers should maintain their real value. Targeted households should include households without land, women-headed households and those living in remote areas. The 2025-26 budget hike is good, but there needs to be consistent reporting and independent evaluation of the program (Shaheen, 2026).

The prevalence of stunting, wasting and anemia continue to be high (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019; Arab News, 2026). The attention of policy should be paid to pregnant women, infants, adolescent girls and young mothers. Food is not the only part of nutrition. Clean water and sanitation, health services and education should work together; health and food policy should be concerted planning. The latest national nutrition survey referenced here is from 2018 (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). Policy would be relevantly kept current with a regular national survey. Here there are two types of support, each playing their part. Cash transfers are used to purchase food for families. To support families in using food well, conditional programs are implemented in BISP (e.g. the Benazir Nashonuma program). Both are needed. A fixed amount of cash will purchase fewer items when prices increase rapidly. In a setting of weak health services, additional food is not always a benefit to a child's growth. If support is provided for both types of support, and if local health and water services are also included, then each of these would be more effective.

Increase Climate and Water Resilience

The 2022 flood was an example of the high cost of climate shocks (World Bank, 2022). There are four standing out actions. Firstly, enhance flood forecasting, drainage and embankment management, and provide timely warnings to farmers. Second, modernize irrigation, minimize water loss and avoid over-irrigation. Thirdly, advocate for the cultivation of heat and drought resilient crops, counselling and climate smart financing of small farmers (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026b). Fourth, ensure continuity in water diplomacy and work towards finding legal and peaceful solutions under the Indus Waters Treaty, and invest in water storage and efficient water use (Michel, 2025). These steps are consistent with the prevention-oriented principle. It's less expensive to fix than to replace.

Maintain Wheat and Market Policy Stable

Wheat is the country's staple food. The 2024 end of the support price was followed by a fall in the sown area (Ahmed, 2025b). Pakistan does not have to go back to the old system, but one that is clear and transparent is needed. This can be done in many ways, such as by a published price range, a fixed size strategic reserve, or by early tracking of area planted and stocks. Significant alterations should be discussed with farmers and millers. Close price monitoring of flour, coupled with targeted support for the poor during lean periods, would help safeguard those most vulnerable (IPC, 2026).

Improve Data and Early Warning

Good policy needs good data. Due to a reduction in districts covered, there is a lack of comparable figures on IPC coverage across periods (UN News, 2026). The goal of Pakistan should be to maintain a gradual and consistent level of coverage in the districts and regularly report on food insecurity, nutrition, food prices, and acreage. Data on rainfall, river flow, crop and price conditions could be correlated so that the planners could foresee trouble earlier. The poor monsoon, the smaller wheat planting and the increase in flour prices all would indicate a problem. Early action can then commence before families reduce their consumption or sell assets.

Enhance Coordination, Empowerment and Cooperation

Food security has cross-sectoral linkages in the agriculture, water, health, social protection and trade sectors, and many of these are provincial related (Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973). Federal and provincial governments should come to a consensus on some joint indicators—including food security, child stunting, and the proportion of households targeted by social protection—then provide data on these indicators on a yearly basis. The National Food Security Council can be the forum for this (Monitoring Report, 2018). There is a need to make the land, credit, and advice available to women farmers. The small farmer has to have his voice heard in water and price policy. Context specific as per Resolution 66/290 (UNGA, 2012) means participation, thereby enhancing the fit between the policy and the local conditions. Last but not least, Pakistan can't handle these issues on its own. Flood Assessment was conducted by the Government of Pakistan and Asian Development Bank (ADB), in collaboration with the European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank (World Bank, 2022). Joint action on climate finance, river information and flood warning would minimize the risk for Pakistan and its neighboring countries.

A Simple Sequence for Action

It can't happen all at once. Pakistan can re-establish the National Food Security Council, resolve data issues in the social protection system, formally announce wheat policy guidelines and restore 100% food insecurity analysis in districts within 1 year. It can make social protection shock-responsive within three years, scale up nutrition programs based on evaluation and update the National Security Policy to incorporate food and water security within three years. Together, over 5-10 years, it can invest in water storage, water use efficiency, climate-smart farming, and collectively address anemia and stunting in health, water, education, and food policy.

Risks Ahead

Pakistan needs to be prepared for multiple hazards. The first is repetition of the climate shocks. After the 2022 floods, there were more flood impacts in 2025 (IPC, 2026). It will take a country that is being hit again and again less time to recover. The second is fiscal pressure. The levels of poverty have increased and it makes funding for relief and social protection more difficult (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026a). The third is water uncertainty because the situation of IWT is ambiguous (Michel, 2025). The fourth is market risk. In the future, wheat production may decline if the farmers reduce their planting (Ahmed, 2025b). These risks can add up. A flood which damaged crops during a period of high prices and scarce public funds would have a devastating impact on the poor household. The least expensive answer is early motion. Making a Plan for Safety before a Flood is not as expensive as rebuilding lives after a Flood.

The following lessons are offered: the Pakistan case can also be used as a lesson to the paradigm. Firstly, the idea is most helpful when applied to a clearly defined problem with a measurable impact. Human security is considered to be too comprehensive by critics (Paris, 2001). It has a clear anchor in food security. There are indicators of hunger, of stunting, of food insecurity and those can be used by policy makers to set thresholds as suggested by Owen (2004) and to monitor progress. Second, protection and empowerment need to go hand-in-hand. While cash and food assistance safeguards against immediate danger, security is achieved through agency (HLPE, 2020). Third, national ownership is no hindrance. The main challenge in Pakistan is really to implement the current national policies and the paradigm provides a clear benchmark to assess the extent of implementation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered the food security at national level in Pakistan under the scope of human security paradigm of UN. The paradigm argues that food security is a component of freedom from want and it calls for a food security response that is people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-based. It also acknowledges national ownership, as well as the role of state security (UNGA, 2012).

The data reveals that Pakistan is not facing the production issue per se. A significant amount of wheat, rice and sugarcane are cultivated in the country (Mahmood, 2026). The issue is access, nutrition, stability and agency. Approximately 42% of the population are moderately or severely food insecure (Shah, 2025). In 2018, out of every 10 children under the age of 5, 4 were stunted (UNICEF Pakistan, 2019). Now, poverty has been escalated to 28.9% (Profit by Pakistan Today, 2026a). Acute hunger due to floods, drought, water stress, and insecurity remains an ongoing issue (IPC, 2026; World Bank, 2022).

Pakistan has tools that are helpful: a National Food Security Policy and a sizeable social protection program. It, however, is weak in prevention, lacks coordination and does not factor food and water into its national security thinking. This paper's recommendations are simple in the sense that they are straightforward. Ensure that food security is considered as national security. Protect the poor households before impact of shocks. Put nutrition first. Build water and climate resilience. Maintain policy consistency for wheat. Use better data. Coordinate across governments. Give women and farmers a voice. A secure state depends on secure people, and no more fundamental requirement than a secure family is that each family should have sufficient access to good food so that they can eat healthy and decent lives.

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